

“Santa Fe is paradise on earth and we will defend it with our live.”

(Cesar Bernardez)

“There Is A Canadian Tourism Mafia That Has Taken Control Of Our Land”

May 29, 2017

<http://radioprogreso.hn.net/index.php/comunicaciones/noticias/item/3668-%E2%80%99Chay-una-mafia-canadiense-que-se-ha-apoderado-de-nuestra-tierra%E2%80%99D>

César Geovany Bernárdez, member of the general coordination of the Fraternal Black Organization of Honduras, OFRANEH, and reporter for Radio Progreso, has been accused by the Canadian tourism investor and operator, Patrick Forseth, for seizing a plot within the indigenous Garifuna community land title of the Guadalupe, in Santa Fe, Colón. Based on these trumped charges, Bermudez was illegally detained by the corrupted local authorities.



Patrick Forseth owns the Carivida Trade Society, along with Randy Jorgensen, known as the “Porn King” who have been denounced for illegal appropriation of the Garifuna lands in Trujillo Bay, according to OFRANEH.



(Randy Jorgensen with the mayor of Trujillo (centre) and then ‘de facto’ president Porfirio Lobo. Lobo was put in power by the military and economic elites, after the 2009 military coup. Lobo lives under a cloud of allegations of having dealings with drug-trafficking cartels. Lobo’s brother and son are implicated in US-DEA criminal investigations into their connections to Mexican cartels.)

In 2008, the community of Guadalupe presented a series of formal complaints to the Prosecutor’s Office for Ethnic groups, because of the illegal sales of land within the perimeters of their community land title, however despite these complaints, the judge Fredy Cenen Caballero Núñez, of the Trujillo Court, attributes ownership to the Carivida Commercial Company of Patrick Forseth.

There are enormous pressures on the territories of the Garifuna coast of Honduras. Trujillo Bay in Colon and Tela in Atlantida are the most coveted by foreign businessmen who, with the aid of Honduran businessmen and politicians, are taking over the beaches and wetlands to construct their tourism emporiums.

Campo Vista, Coroza Alta, New Palm Beach, Alta Vista, Carivida and Banana Coast are just some of the Canadian businesses denounced by OFRANEH due to their practice of unduly acquiring lands because of the negligence and/or corruption of the authorities responsible for investigating and complying with the law.

In 2016, in this very same community, Guadalupe, the Garifuna leader Medaline Martina David Fernandez was detained for the supposed crime of seizing Carivida’s lands. The Trujillo courts issued a dismissal in favor of the Garifuna leader, but in May 2017, OFRANEH’s social communicator and journalist for Radio Progreso, Cesar Geovany Bernardez, was illegally detained for the same reason.

“There is a Canadian tourism mafia that has taken control of our lands” said Cesar Bernardez, after being granted alternative measures to imprisonment; Bernardez must attend a hearing on June 14, 2017 in Trujillo. Cesar is the voice of the Garifuna communities. Through the radios of

OFRANEH and Radio Progreso Cesar has been denouncing the plunder they have suffered thanks to the implementation of the extractivist-tourism model.

“The illegal sale of land in the communities has been instigated by the municipality of Santa Fe, with the support of the State’s Institute of Property,” pointed out Bernardez, arguing that the Honduran government and Canadian businessmen are trying to weaken community titles in order to install tourism complexes.

The lands acquired by the Carivida company had formed part of an ecotourism project that had been implemented with the financing of the UNDP (United Nations Development Project) and AECID, but the project was affected by the wave of violence provoked when a hydroelectric dam was installed on the Betulia river, described Cesar Bernardez. “There was never any consultation for that hydroelectric project, and it has only brought us death and misfortune” Cesar adds.

Miram Miranda, the coordinator of OFRANEH, has stated publicly that all Garifuna communities are under threat of disappearance as a result of the implementation of the “model cities” brought forth by mining exploitation, the construction of hydroelectric dams and mega-projects for tourism, that enjoy the approval of the government while ignoring the life and dignity of the communities.

A Racist Honduran State that Violates Human Rights.

“Santa Fe is paradise on earth and we will defend it with our lives” assured Cesar, who was victim of racism and violence at the moment of his detention by the La Ceiba police in Atlantida because he is Garifuna. “All black people are criminals”, “You had to be black” and “Stinking black” were some of the expressions that the police said to Cesar while he was handcuffed behind the cells, paying for his defense of the mother land.

OFRANEH, an organization that joins together the Garifuna communities in the Honduran coasts, has carried out a struggle, within the country and abroad, to defend its ancestral lands.

In October 2015, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) ruled against Honduras for the violation of multiple rights of the Garifuna communities in El Triunfo de la Cruz in the municipality of Tela, Atlantida and in Punta Piedra in the department of Colon.

An inter-institutional commission has been formed for “Compliance with the Rulings in Favor of the Garifuna Communities”. The commission is a place for dialogue and negotiation, to coordinate actions to achieve compliance with the resolutions of the Inter American Court ruling from October 8, 2015, in favor of the Garifuna communities of Triunfo de la Cruz and Punta Piedra, after finding Honduras responsible for the violation of the right to collective property.

Despite criminalization and threats, Cesar has participated in all of these meetings to inform and encourage the Garifuna communities through the radios of OFRANEH and Radio Progreso. He knows well that the struggle to defend the land is difficult and that foreign investment from Canada are a component of the implementation of the famous “Model Cities”.

Names/Addresses:

- Carivida Villas - www.carivida.com
- Ambassador Michael Gort, Embassy of Canada in Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua, Tel: (504) 2232-4551; Michael.gort@international.gc.ca; tglpa@international.gc.ca
- Isabelle Solon Helal, Governance Specialist, Natural Resources and Governance Division, isabelle.solohehal@international.gc.ca
- Jason Smith, U.S. government Human Rights and Labor representative, SmithJA6@state.gov (with copy to GromovichG@state.gov)

Background:

Canadian tourism investors “criminalizing” Garifuna people on their own lands: community defender illegally detained in Honduras

By Karen Spring, Honduras Solidarity Network

<http://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/indigenous-garifuna-community-defender-illegally-detained-in-hondurascanadian-tourism-investors-criminalizing-garifuna-people-on-their-own-lands>

More information

- OFRANEH (Organizacion Fraternal Negra Hondureña), garifuna@ofraneh.org, www.ofraneh.org, <http://www.ofraneh.wordpress.com>
- Karen Spring, Honduras Solidarity Network, Spring.kj@gmail.com
- Grahame Russell, Rights Action, info@rightsaction.org

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